

[The Golden Image]

Lorin W. Brown

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The Golden Image

Don Higinio Torrez had just returned from the Salt Lakes near Williard. Through some arrangement with a friend from Chimayo he had made this last rip trip in a little truck. Knowing that this was Higinio's first ride in any kind of an automobile I had gone to greet him on his return and also to hear his account of his trip. It was bound to be humorous as were all his conversations.

The whole village loved this old gentleman because of his entertaining qualities. His humble little home was always crowded during the long winter evenings_ then Higinio was in his element singing songs and spinning tales. Any incident which he chose to relate, however commonplace would be related in such a humorous way as to keep his audience doubled up with laughter.

Another function for which Higinio was much sought after was that of "resador" or leader of prayers at a wake or at the death-bed of one for whom there was no time to call the priest,

As a recompense for his indispensability to the community Higinio was usually elected Justice of the Peace. Occasional cases brought before him should have brought him in some spending money from the fees due the Justice of the Peace. But Higinio's good hearted endeavors were usually extended towards a settlement out of court. As an extra

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inducement he usually would agree to forego any court costs so that really the position of Justice of the Peace was only an honorary position with rarely any monetary remuneration.

As an added source of income Higinio would bring in salt from the salt lakes and "yeso" or plaster of paris from near Cienega.

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These commodities he would trade for grain, beans or whole wheat flour, measure for measure. These trading activities brought him in the necessary food for himself and his diminutive wife. So on the whole he lived well according to his simple wants and he enjoyed life whole heartedly.

So this evening of his return I found that others of the village had preceded me and his house was already full of his neighbors, their children and his grand-children.

"Buenas tardes Don Higinio, como le fue en su viaje?" was my greeting as I entered. "Bien amiguito" Very well my friend. "We flew all the way," "Look you" we stopped to eat lunch the first day where I used to camp on my second night when I went in my wagon and team." "What wonderful things these automobiles are." And that evening we arrived early at the Lakes. And now you have me back here on the evening of the second day with a load of as white and pure salt as I have ever brot back."

Now you all know it used to take me a week to make the trip with my little team staying the first night at Santa Fe and the second night I usually camped [?] at San Cristobal near that old Indian village.

You know that during the war I made a trip for salt and on the second day I camped as usual near San Cristobal. I noticed when I was making camp a group of men near the old church. They went by my camp as I was getting supper and I noticed they were covered with dust. Soon my little grand-son Remigio came back from picketing the horses where they could graze.

What could those men be doing digging near the old church, "grand-pa". "Quien sabe, hijo" how many were there?" There were four and a fat Americano was watching them" replied Remigio. "Well let's eat supper and then we will go see" I promised.

It was still light as we neared a large hole back of the church ruins. We had nearly reached the edge of the hole when a big fat Americano stepped around the corner of the church. He had a rifle with him and asked us, "What do you want, what are you doing here?" "Nada Senor just wondering what those men were digging here for. A well perhaps?" was my reply.

"Yes a well and you had better leave, you have no business here." Where are you from was his angry reply.

We are from Quemado and are camped over here on the stream. We are leaving in the morning. "Well see that you leave in the morning and don't come snooping around here again." with this reply he waved us away.

We went back to camp wondering what they could be digging for, maybe one of those springs which the Ondians stopped up when they left, or maybe digging up graves. Why couldn't they leave the poor dead Indians in peace.

Next morning as we were preparing to harness our horses this same fat Americano came up to our camp. He was smiling [?] now and gave us good morning very pleasantly."

"Amigo are you in a very big hurry to leave, if you are not I can give you maybe two days work. Only one of my men came back this morning to help. The rest of the "tontos" are afraid of being bewitched. They don't like digging in this Indian pueblo" If you will help me I will pay you well and give you some corn for your horses."

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Well my poor horses were thin and there was good grazing around the camp. The gramma grass was this high and I could use the money which I would earn. So taking the harness off the horses I agreed to work. I was curious to see what was going on.

The Americano went with me to the old church and getting me a shovel I started digging with my "compadero" a man from Galisteo I can't remember his name.

Near noon the Senor Americano measured the depth of the hole and shook his head and cursing started measuring from the corner of the church. "You fellows eat your lunch and we will try another place afterward."

Sure enough after lunch he had marked another spot a few feet from where we had dug before.

All that day and the next day we worked hard and the fat Americano didn't help us any. He was too fat for work. Towards evening of the second day we struck some poles laid crosswise in the earth. Now the fat man was all excited. He almost fell in the hole trying to tell us how to dig. Following his instructions we dug around the cedar poles and lifting them up carefully uncovered a sort of pit walled and floored with the same kind of cedar poles. In it were several objects wrapped in buckskin and tied around with thongs. As I was lifting the largest of these out, and it was very heavy, the buckskin wrappings came loose and it fell back in the hole leaving the buckskin in my hands.

I stooped down to pick it up, and you will not believe me but it was a golden image of San Cristobal about so large". Here Higinio extended his hands to indicate the size of the image.

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From this judged the size of the image to be about eighteen or twenty inches.

Did you get to see any of the other articles and do you thing it was made of gold?" I asked.

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No I didn't get to see the other objects only as I could feel them [?] thru the buckskin. The Americano seemed angry because we had seen what we had and told us to put the other things outside the hole near the edge. After he was sure we had taken every thing out he told us to climb out. "This is all the work, men I will pay you now. You had better leave right away." He gave me ten dollars for my work, more than I had expected. How much he gave the other man I don't know.

"What did the other objects feel like" was my next question.

Oh some felt like big cups and plates others just like heavy bars. There were not many and none weighed asmuch as the gold image, if it was gold." was the old man's response.

On the way past my camp I asked my companero from Galisteo who the Americano was. He called him "El Panquere" something like those little tortillas I ate in a restaurant once.

It was not hard to figure out that the name hinted at as "Pancake" must be Pankey.

Perhaps I was right, though I have heard nothing more to substantiate the old man's tale. If his account is true this may explain Mr. Pankey's financial standing of later years.

"Every time I pass that place I remember about that golden image I suppose the priests buried it there to hide it from the Indians; Quien Sabe but how did this Americano know where to dig for. The tale is true that when God was passing out gifts to the different races 6 he granted Los Americanos the gift or riches which they asked for. And us Mexicanos we asked for enjoyment of life in the form of wine, women and song. That is why we find ourselves so poor but always enjoying life.

by Lorin W. Brown